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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effectiveness of an alternative certification program for secondary teachers that emphasized the need for certified teachers in rural districts. The program utilized distance learning and integrated technology. Thirty uncertified secondary teachers who taught the previous year in Louisiana public schools completed 27 hours of modular coursework and were employed to teach in their content area for the next year. Districts provided onsite mentors, release time, and continued collaboration with participants. The university provided instruction through campus courses, compressed video sites, e-mail, online mentors, and other technologies. Courses were delivered as integrated professional development modules addressing the knowledge and skills needed to meet the state's Intern Evaluation Program. Participants also received PRAXIS preparation workshops, weekly mentoring sessions, and help developing professional portfolios. Participants were surveyed regarding their perceptions, use of, and satisfaction with the technology. Most believed that instructors frequently engaged students at the local site, though fewer considered this true at distance sites. Most reported frequent use of e-mail to correspond with instructors and mentors. Participants preferred the compressed video format to on-campus courses. All participants utilized the PRAXIS workshops. Participants showed confusion over the completion of professional portfolios and occasional unavailability of onsite mentors. Contains the evaluation survey. (SM)

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Using Technology to Certify Secondary Teachers: The Alternative Certification Project

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Using Technology to Certify Secondary Teachers:
The Alternative Certification Project

As we enter the first years of the 21st century, the problems of teacher retention and employment of certified teachers continue to plague school districts. Despite the best efforts of Colleges of Education and State Departments, there continues to be a shortage of certified teachers, particularly in rural or at-risk school settings. Boe, Bobbitt and Cook (1997) reported that more than 125,000 teachers in grades k-12 leave the profession annually. Many of these are first year teachers who do not stay in the profession. Colbert and Wolff (1992) estimated that close to 50% of teachers in urban school systems leave the profession within the first five years. In an effort to staff classrooms, many districts have to resort to filling these vacancies with uncertified teachers. Many states are increasing efforts to provide alternative certification programs in an attempt to meet this need. The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of an alternative certification program for secondary teachers with a particular emphasis on rural school districts.

To address this need for certified teachers, a program was developed utilizing distance learning and the integration of technology into an alternative certification program. Thirty uncertified secondary teachers who taught last year in north Louisiana in public school systems were identified through collaboration between the Louisiana Tech University, local school administrators from 11 districts, and interested, uncertified teachers. The requirements for inclusion in the program were (a) all participants held a Bachelors degree in a content area,

b) each agreed to complete the twenty-seven hours of modular coursework (some by compressed video) and (c) were employed to teach in their content area for the next year (200-2001) by their school districts. Districts agreed to provide on-site mentors, release time for program participants and continued collaboration with program participants. The university provided instruction through campus courses, three compressed video sites, email, online mentors, and other technologies.

Courses were delivered as Integrated Professional Development Modules designed to address the knowledge base and performance skills needed to meet the Intern Evaluation Program adopted by the State of Louisiana. Participants also received PRAXIS preparation workshops, weekly mentoring sessions, and assistance in developing a professional portfolio.

The program began in the summer of 2000 with three modules being delivered to the distance sites. Of the initial participants, twenty-nine met all requirements for continued enrollment in the program for the fall 2000 term (one participant was not reemployed in his content area and thus was dropped from the program). Participants were employed in 10 different school districts, were teaching in 6 different subject areas, and had an average age of 28.4 years. Modules (3 semester hours each) were delivered with a class meeting on the university campus connected by T1 lines to two other distance sites. Each site had two monitors, a microphone and a FAX. Two sites had computers connected with the monitors and one site had an Elmo system and document

cam. Students could chose which site was most convenient for them. In the summer, classes met every other day for 10 weeks and once a week in the fall term. The program is to continue through the spring for a total of 27 semester hours (nine of which will be a supervised internship). Participants also received regular email correspondence with instructors as well as computer tutorials for Praxis preparation.

As a formative assessment of the program, data were gathered using a survey (see appendix) during the summer and fall regarding student perceptions, use of, and satisfaction with the technology used in this project. Qualitative data were also collected regarding student perception and satisfaction with the program. A summary of preliminary results follows.

Student Perceptions of Interaction

- Eighty nine percent of the students believed that instructors frequently engaged students at the local site but fewer (68%) believed this to be true at the same rates in the distance sites.
- Regarding student interaction between sites, larger numbers (82%) believed interaction was more present at the campus site than at the remote sites (58%).
- Few of the students (41%) reported regular interaction outside of class with participants not at their site.

Student Perception of Use of Technology

- Eighty nine percent reported the frequent use of email to correspond with instructors and mentors.
- Fifty five percent reported the frequent or occasional use of FAX to correspond with instructors.
- Only 44 percent reported the frequent or occasional use of long distance calls to instructors.

Student Satisfaction with Technology

- Seventy nine percent believed the presence of a monitor/technician at each site who was not a student in the class would have improved the quality of the modules.
- Ninety three percent felt that the instructor answered questions from all sites.
- Eighty two percent felt that the equipment was easy to use, see and hear.
- Ninety three percent felt that being on camera was not a problem.
- Ninety three percent felt that it was easy to exchange information with all sites.
- Seventy two percent felt that they now use technology more effectively and more often as a result of the distance classes.
- Eighty two percent would take another distance class although only seventy two percent acknowledged paying as much attention via compressed video as they would if in a traditional class and only sixty two percent said they were learning as much as if they were in a traditional class.

Problems, Concerns, and Continuing Improvement

On some occasions the T1 lines would go down and instruction was interrupted, although students did not note this as a major problem (37%). Other equipment issues involved the lack of camera control at the distance sites by the instructor at the local site and the lack of comparable equipment (elmo, document cam, computers) at all sites. While travel was limited for participants, faculty did travel to all three sites at different times so as to give all participants both a local and distance education experience.

Although all participants had access to email through their schools, not all utilized it regularly. Sometimes messages to participants would go unread and/or unanswered. Just having the technology available does not mean all participants will use it.

As the project continues, additional data analysis is planned including a factor analysis of survey items and inferrential comparisons of data from each of the three sites. It is also expected that all participants will pass all parts of the PRAXIS and successfully complete all components of the Louisiana Intern Evaluation Program.

Data indicate that participants prefer the compressed video format to on campus courses (travel is a probable contributing factor), most make regular use of the electronic mentors via email, and all have utilized the Praxis workshops. Less encouraging is the confusion of participants over the completion of professional portfolios and the occasional unavailability of on site mentors.

Nevertheless, the project appears to be meeting its goal of increasing the number of certified secondary teachers. Other school districts and universities may be able to learn from this project in an effort to integrate technology into the preparation of alternatively certified teachers.

References

Boe, E., Bobbitt, S., & Cook, L. (1997). Why didst thou go? Predictors of retention, transfer, and attrition of special education and general ediucation teachers from a national perspective. The Journal of Special Education (30), 390-411.

Colbert, J., & Wolff, D. (1992). Surviving in urban schools. Journal of Teacher Education, (43), 193-199.

SECONDARY T-PACS: PROGRAM EVALUATION SURVEY

Please complete the following survey as a part of the evaluation of this program. Your name is requested only for purposes of data collection. Your responses to all items will be held in confidence by the Program Evaluator who is NOT involved in determining your grade in any module. All responses will be reported as grouped data – your anonymity is assured. Your responses will assist us in improving the content and delivery of this program.

Please use the scales/choices provided to mark the most appropriate response. Local Site is where the instructor was/ remote site is a site other than that of the instructor

STUDENT PERCEPTION:

	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom	Never	Not Observed
The instructor/s initiated interaction during class with students at the local site.					
The instructor/s initiated interaction during class with students at the remote site.					
The instructor/s initiated interaction outside of class with the local site students					
The instructor/s initiated interaction outside of class with the remote site students					
The local site students initiated interaction in class with the instructor/s.					
The local site students initiated interaction outside of class with the instructor/s.					
The remote site students initiated interaction in class with the instructor/s.					
The remote site students initiated interaction outside in class of class with the instructor/s.					
The local site students initiated interaction in class with other local site students.					
The local site students initiated interaction outside of class with other local site students.					
The local site students initiated interaction in class with remote site students.					
The local site students initiated interaction outside of class with other remote site students.					
The remote site students initiated interaction in class with other remote site students.					

The remote site students initiated interaction outside of class with other remote site students. _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

The remote site students initiated interaction in class with local site students.. _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

The remote site students initiated interaction outside of class with local site students. _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

I used email to contact the instructor/s and/or other students in the class. _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

I used FAX to contact the instructor/s and/or other students in the class. _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

I used long distance calls to contact the instructor/s and/or other students in the class _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

Having a monitor/technician at every site would improve the quality of the courses. _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

STUDENT SATISFACTION	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
It is easy to pay attention to the instructor on the TV monitor.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
I feel the TV instructor is available to answer my questions.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
The instructor pays attention to students at the remote site during class.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
The class is well organized.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
I pay as much attention in the distance class as I do in a regular class.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
I feel encouraged to become involved in class discussions and activities.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
I feel I am part of the class.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
I feel the instructor is speaking directly to me.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
I would consider taking a distance course as a remote class student.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
I feel the students at the other site/s are very much a part of the class.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
The fact that I am on TV does not inhibit my class participation.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

I enjoy interacting with students at the other site/s.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
It is easy to use the microphone.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
It is easy to see the monitor.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
It is easy to hear comments made by students at the other site/s.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Graphics and other visuals are easy to read on the monitor.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Technical problems have not interfered with my learning.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
I have adequate access to the resources I need for class.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
There are adequate ways to contact the instructor outside of class.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
An efficient system is provided for students and instructors to exchange class materials.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
I am learning as much in a distance class as I would in a regular class.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
I know more about technology as a result of the distance class.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
I use technology more in my life and teaching as a result of the distance class.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
I feel I benefited from sharing travel with other students to the course site.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
I would tell my friends to take a distance class.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
I would take another distance class.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Overall, I am satisfied with my distance education class.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

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